

The Mardi Gras Mystery

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

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GRAMONT AND FELL

SYNOPSIS—During the height of the New Orleans carnival season Jachin Fell, wealthy though somewhat mysterious citizen, and Dr. Asbury, are discussing a series of robberies by an individual known as the Midnight Masquer, who, invariably attired as an aviator, has long defied the police. Joseph Maillard, wealthy banker, is giving a ball that night, at which the Masquer has threatened to appear and rob the guests. Fell and Asbury, on their way to the affair, meet a girl dressed as Columbine, seemingly known to Fell, but masked, who accompanies them to the ball. Lucile Ledanois, recently the ward of her uncle, Joseph Maillard, is the Columbine. At the ball, Rob Maillard, son of the banker, asks a girl to dance and is refused. He offers to buy some of her property. A Frenchman, much interested in her, turns out to be Prince Gramont, in his library Joseph Maillard and a group of his friends are surprised by the Midnight Masquer.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"You money trickster! Do you think I would spare such a man as you? You draw your funds from the poor and destitute, your mortgages cover half the parishes in the state, and in your heart is neither compassion nor pity for man or woman. Bah! I could shoot you down without a qualm!"

In his voice was so deadly a menace that Maillard trembled.

"There is nothing of mine in that safe," he said, his voice a low growl. "I have given it to my son to use. He is not here."

"That," said the Masquer calmly, "is exactly why I desire you to open it. Your son must make his contribution for I keenly regret his absence. If you are a criminal, he is worse! You rob and steal under shelter of the law, but you have certain limitations, certain bounds of an almost grown honor. He has none, that son of yours. Why, he would not hesitate to turn your own tricks back upon you, to rob you, if he could! Open that safe or take the consequences; no more talk, now!"

The command cracked out like a whip. With a shrug of helplessness the banker turned and fumbled with the protruding knob of the safe. With one exception all eyes were fastened upon this amazing Masquer. The exception was Jachin Fell, who, suddenly alert and watchful, had turned his attention to Maillard and the safe, a keen speculation in his gaze as though he were wondering what that steel vault would produce. All were silent. There was something about this Midnight Masquer that held them intently. Perhaps some were inclined to think him a jester, one of the party masquerading under the famous hand's guise; if so, his last words to Maillard had removed all such thought. That indictment had been deadly and terrible—and true, as they knew. Rob Maillard was not greatly admired by those among his father's friends who best knew him.

Now the door of the safe swung open. The compartments appeared empty.

"Take out the drawers and turn them up over the table," commanded the Masquer.

Maillard obeyed. From the last drawer there fell out on the table a large envelope, sealed. The Masquer leaned forward, seized upon this envelope, and crushed it into his pocket.

"Thank you," he observed. "That is all."

"D—n you!" cried Maillard, shaking a fist. "You'd try blackmail, would you?"

The hand that regarded him a moment, then laughed.

"If you knew what was in that envelope, my dear financier, you might not speak so hastily. If I knew what was in it, I might answer you. But I don't know. I only suspect—and hope. And now, my friends—au revoir!"

The Masquer sprang backward into the hall. The door slammed, the key clicked. He was gone!

Maillard was the first to wake into voice and action. "The other door!" he cried. "Into the dining room!"

He flung open a second door and dashed into the dining room, followed by the other men. Here the windows, giving upon the garden, were open. Then Maillard came to a sudden halt, and after him the others; through the night was pulsating, with great distinctness, the throbbing roar of an airplane motor! From Maillard broke a bitter cry:

"The detectives—I'll get the fools here! You gentlemen search the house. That fellow can't possibly have escaped!"

They hastily separated. Maillard dashed away to summon the detectives, also to get other men to aid in the search.

The result was vain. No one had been seen to enter or leave the house, and certainly there had been no airplane about. The Masquer had not appeared except in the library, and now he was most indubitably not in the house. By all testimony, he had neither entered it nor left it!

"Well, I'm d—d!" said Maillard, indignantly, to Judge Forester, when

the search was concluded. "Not a trace of the scoundrel! Here, Fell—can't you help us out? Haven't you discovered a thing?"

"Nothing," responded Jachin Fell, calmly.

At this instant Rob Maillard rushed up. He had just learned of the Masquer's visit. In response to his excited questioning his father described the scene in the library, and added:

"I trust there was nothing important among those papers of yours, Robert?"

"No," said the younger man. "No. Nothing valuable at all."

Henry Gramont was passing. He caught the words and paused, his gaze resting for an instant upon the group. A faint smile rested upon his rather harshly drawn features.

"I just found this," he announced, holding out a paper. "It was pinned to the outside of the library door. I presume that your late visitor left it as a memento?"

Jachin Fell took the paper, the other men crowding around him.

"Ah, Maillard! The same handwriting as that of your letter?"

Upon the paper was pencilled a single hasty line:

"My compliments to Robert Maillard—and my thanks."

Rob Maillard sprang forward, angrily inspecting the paper. When he relinquished it, Fell calmly claimed it.

"Confound the rogue!" muttered the banker's son, turning away. His features were pale, perhaps with anger.

"There was nothing but stock certificates in that envelope—and they can be replaced."

The festivities were not broken up. News of the robbery gradually leaked out among the guests; the generally accepted verdict was that the Masquer had appeared, only to be frightened away before he could secure any loot.

It was nearly two in the morning when Jachin Fell, who was leaving, encountered Henry Gramont at the head of the wide stairway. He halted and turned to the younger man.

"Ah—have you a pencil, if you please?"

"I think so, Mr. Fell." Gramont felt beneath his Franciscan's robe, and extended a pencil.

Jachin Fell examined it, brought a paper from beneath his domino, and



"Did You Actually See the Midnight Masquer Last Night?"

wrote down a word. The paper was that on which the farewell message of the Midnight Masquer had been written.

"A hard lead, a very hard point indeed!" said Fell. He pocketed the paper again and regarded Gramont steadily as he returned the pencil. "Few men carry so hard a pencil, sir."

"You're quite right," and Gramont smiled. "I borrowed this from Rob Maillard only a moment ago. Its hardness surprised me."

"Do you know, a most curious thing?"

"Yes?" prompted Gramont, his eyes intent upon the little gray man.

"That paper you brought us—the paper which you found pinned to the library door," said Fell, apologetically. "Do you know, Mr. Gramont, that oddly enough there were no pin holes in that paper?"

Gramont smiled faintly, as though he were inwardly amused over the remark.

"Not at all curious," he said, his voice level. "It was pinned rather stoutly—I tore off the portion bearing the message. I'll wager that you'll find the end of the paper still on the door downstairs. You might make certain that its torn edge fits that of the paper in your pocket; if it did not, then the fact would be curious! I am most happy to have met you, Mr. Fell. I trust we shall meet again, often."

With a smile, he extended his hand, which Mr. Fell shook cordially.

Upon gaining the lower hall Fell glanced at the door of the library. There, still pinned to the wood where it had been disregarded by the pass-

ers-by, was a small scrap of paper. Mr. Fell glanced at it again, then shook his head and slowly turned away, as though resisting a temptation.

"No," he muttered. "No. It would be sure to fit the paper in my pocket. It would be sure to fit, confound him!"

A little later he left the house, striding briskly down the avenue. When he approached the first street light he came to a pause, and began softly to put his person as though searching for something.

"I told you that you'd pay for knowing too much about me, young man!" he said, softly. "What's this, now—what's this?"

A slight rustle of paper, as he walked along, had attracted his attention. He passed his hands over the loose, open domino that clanked him; he detected a scrap of paper pinned to it in the rear. He loosened the paper, and under the street light managed to decipher the writing which it bore.

A faint smile crept to his lips as he read the pencilled words:

"I do not love you, Jachin Fell. The reason why, I cannot tell. But this I know, and know full well, I do not love you, Jachin Fell."

"Certainly the fellow has wit, if not originality," muttered Mr. Fell, as he carefully stowed away the paper. The writing upon it was in the hand of the Midnight Masquer.

CHAPTER IV.

Callers.

The house in which Lucile Ledanois lived had been her mother's; the furniture and other things in it had been her mother's; the two negro servants, who spoke only the Creole French patois, had been her mother's. It was a small house, but very beautiful inside. The exterior betrayed a lack of paint or the money with which to have painting done.

The Ledanois family, although distantly connected with others such as the Maillards, had sent forth its final bud of fruit in the girl Lucile. Her mother had died while she was yet an infant, and through the years she had accompanied her father, an invalid, during the latter days. He had never been a man to count dollars or cents, and to a large extent he had outgrown himself and the family fortunes in a vain search for health.

With Lucile he had been in Europe at the outbreak of war, and had come home to America only to die shortly afterward. Once deprived of his fine recklessness, the girl had found her affairs in a bad tangle. Under the guardianship of Maillard the tangle had been somewhat resolved and simplified, but even Maillard would appear to have made mistakes, and of late Lucile had against her will suspected something amiss in the matter of these mistakes.

It was natural, then, that she should take Jachin Fell into her confidence. Maillard had been her guardian, but it was to Fell that she had always come with her girlish cares and troubles, during even the lifetime of her father.

At precisely three o'clock of the Sunday afternoon Jachin Fell rang the doorbell and Lucile herself admitted him.

"Tell me quickly, Uncle Jachin," eagerly exclaimed the girl. "Did you actually see the Midnight Masquer last night? I didn't know until afterward that he had really been downstairs and had robbed!"

"I saw him, my dear," and the little gray man smiled. There was more warmth to his smile than usual just now. Perhaps it was a reflection from the eager vitality which so shone in the eyes of Lucile. "I saw him, yes."

A restful face was hers—not beautiful at first glance; a little too strong for beauty, one would say. The deep gray eyes were level and quiet and wide apart, and on most occasions were quite inscrutable. They were now filled with a quick eagerness as they rested upon Jachin Fell. Lucile called him uncle, but not as she called Joseph Maillard uncle; here was no relationship, no formal affection of relationship, but a purely abiding trust and friendship.

Jachin Fell had done more for Lucile than she herself knew or would know; without her knowledge he had quietly taken care of her finances to an appreciable extent. Between them lay an affection that was very real. Lucile, better than most, knew the extraordinary capabilities of this little gray man; yet not even Lucile guessed a tenth of the character that lay beneath his surface. To her he was never reserved or secretive. Nonetheless, she touched sometimes an impenetrable wall that seemed ever present within him.

The annual consumption of hickory by the handle trade is something over 120,000,000 feet board measure. Little, if any, of this material passes through the sawmills, for it is ordinarily cut and shipped to the handle factories in the form of log bolts or billets. All hickories do not give the same service when made into handles. The various parts of the same tree may show different properties, and the quality of the wood near the center is quite likely to differ from that nearer the bark.

The wood of the butt of a young hickory tree is of greater average toughness than it is when the tree is old. The wood of butt cuts of both old and young trees is tougher than that cut higher up the trunk. The handle manufacturers, for the most part, demand second-growth hickory, which consists of young stock of rapid growth.

Best Material for Handles.
Hickory is the best known material for certain classes of tool handles, such as the ax, adz, pick, hammer, and

hatchet. There is a certain strength, toughness and elasticity to hickory which nature has denied to other commercial woods. Some are stronger, many are harder, but the rare combination of the qualities mentioned is lacking in all of them.

The raw material for handles in the form of short log bolts is sometimes split into handle blanks in the woods, but the usual practice is to rip-saw the bolts into blanks at the factory. The split-handle blank is considered superior to the sawed blank in that it insures a straight-grain handle. On the other hand, sawed blanks, though they are likely to show more cross grain, are more economical in the use of timber.

Hickory, due to its unrivaled properties of great strength, elasticity, and resiliency, is used exclusively in the manufacture of handles of golf clubs. The constantly increasing popularity of this sport has placed another demand on the hickory supply.

KEEP CONTAINERS UP TO THEIR FULL SIZE
"Short" Baskets Due to Lack of Proper Inspection.

Manufacturers Are Ready to Correct Any Defects Pointed Out by Department of Agriculture—Shippers Blamed.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)
A "short" tomato basket masquerading as a 4-quart Gill basket. The United States Department of Agriculture picks up the seam. On the "trail of the troublesome till" the chase is called.

Partly through a desire to conform to the wishes of the shippers and partly because of failure to have the basket forms inspected frequently, containers far short of the standard measure were being made. Short-measure Gill baskets for fruits and vegetables are frequently the result of careless handling of the forms used in manufacturing the containers. The department points out: Dropping the forms on the floor or otherwise mauling them can easily knock them out of shape.

Forms and containers of numerous basket manufacturers in the United States are inspected as often as possible by the department, and the experience has been that the manufacturers are ready to correct any defects in a desire to turn out baskets of standard size. But the department cannot get around to all manufacturers, who are therefore being urged to have their forms frequently inspected and to submit samples of their output to the department to be tested. If the shippers generally would also appreciate the desirability of uniform containers, the standardization of containers would be a simple matter, says the department.

VALUABLE HICKORY TIMBER GROWS SCATTERINGLY OVER LARGE AREAS



Group of Hickories—Pignut in the Center, Shagbark on the Sides—Putnam County, Tennessee.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Hickory timber, although held in seemingly vast amount by the forests of the country, may soon become insufficient to meet American manufacturing and woodworking needs. The increasing demand for this valuable species, together with the scattered character of its growth in the forest, has resulted in merchantable stands becoming more and more inaccessible and difficult to log.

Stands Are Widely Scattered.
The Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, puts the country's present supply of hickory, distributed through 200,000,000 acres of forests, at 15,784,000,000 board feet. Of this the Central states have 1,701,000,000 feet, the lower Mississippi states 5,171,000,000 feet, the South Atlantic and East Gulf states 3,183,000,000 feet, the Middle Atlantic states 4,120,000,000 board feet, the Lake states 187,000,000 feet, and the New England states 40,000,000 feet.

One of the uses to which hickory is put is the manufacture of spokes for automobile wheels. The yearly demand upon the hickory reserves by this industry alone is tremendous, as there is much waste in getting the spokes, but also the rims of wheels.

Industries Compete for Hickory.
For the most part vehicle and agricultural implement industries compete with the handle industry for hickory and ash. These are located mainly in the Middle West, but now derive most of their wood supplies from the South.

A large number of far-sighted organizations purchased more or less extensive hardwood tracts some years ago, from which they are now able to draw at least a part of their wood supplies. To secure hickory, which grows scatteringly over large areas, the vehicle and vehicle-implement industries originally maintained extensive buying, logging, and milling organizations in the South. They draw upon every conceivable source—farmers' woodlots, small mills, large sawmills, and even specialized operations designed to secure hickory alone. These concerns in general carry in stock about a two years' supply of special-dimension stock.

Makers of automobile wheels say that they can still get the material required if they make sufficient effort and pay the price, but it is necessary to go farther and farther away for it. Many inquiries received by the forest service from vehicle implement makers, requesting information on possible substitutes for the woods used in vehicle making, is merely another indication of the difficulties in getting adequate supplies at the present time and of uncertainty as to the future.

Ten Different Kinds of Hickories.
Hickory is often referred to as if it were a single species, like red gum or yellow poplar. In reality there are 10 different kinds of hickory trees. For hickory-handle purposes those known as true hickories are most valuable. The pecan hickories include the water, nutmeg, and bitter nut varieties. The true hickories comprise shagbark, pig shellbark, pignut, and mocker nut.

The handle industry is largely dependent on this last group of trees for its raw material.

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SOY BEAN GOOD CATCH CROP
Regular Practice at Missouri Agricultural College and is Very Successful.

The growing of soy beans as a catch crop after wheat is a regular practice at the Missouri agricultural experiment station and has been very successful. Under some conditions the catch crop is worth as much as the main crop. The beans can be cut for hay in plenty of time for fall seedling of wheat.

PRODUCTION OF CLOVER SEED
Crop for 1922 Expected to Be Larger Than Last Year—Not as Heavy as 1918.

The 1922 production of crimson clover seed is expected to be larger than last year's small crop, although it will not approach the heavy production of 1918 and 1919, according to reports received by the United States Department of Agriculture.

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Mr. M. J. Miller, R. R. No. 1, Box 101, Calcutta, India, writes:

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By keeping Pe-Ru-Na in the home for emergencies, you can save a great deal of money by preventing illness. Use it before the grip of disease strikes.

Sold Everywhere
Some Display.
"Will knickers do?"
"I don't see why not. There's about the same length of knickers exhibited."

—Leiterville Courier-Journal.

The poorest Arab woman paints her eyes with kohl to make them appear larger and more brilliant.

ARE YOU GIVING OUT?

Does every day mean just another day of suffering? Are you lame, stiff and achy-tortured with a nerve-racking backache? Surely there's a reason why you feel so badly and likely it's weakened kidneys. When the kidneys fail, poisons accumulate and upset the whole system. That's why you have constant backache and sharp, stabbing twinges. You may have headache, nervous and dizzy spells with annoying bladder irregularities. Don't risk serious kidney disease. Use Doan's Kidney Pills. Doan's have helped thousands and should help you. Ask your neighbor!

An Illinois Case

Mrs. Wm. Oster, Mrs. Ann Kline, Street, Peoria, Ill., says: "I had pain through the small of my back and they were so severe at times I could hardly turn over. I started under a shoulder blade. I times. My kidneys acted too freely. A friend advised me to try Doan's Kidney Pills. Two boxes cured me so I haven't had any trouble since."

Get Doan's at Any Store, or a Box DOAN'S KIDNEY PILLS

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Look for the name Gold Medal on every box and accept no imitation.

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Nujol is a lubricant—not a medicine or laxative—so cannot gripe. Try it today.

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